

Editorial Consultant's Note: The essays that form the bulk of our Mail Call content are produced by the Thursday afternoon writing group. Members of the group spend 10-15 minutes at the beginning of the group writing on a common topic. This is not the time for rules of grammar, punctuation, or spelling. The only "rule" is that members write without stopping for the designated time, even if their minds go blank and they have to write nonsense. Fairly quickly their thoughts return to the topic, and they are off on a new train of thought. This is a technique known to writers and writing teachers as freewriting, which stimulates thought, and in the 3 ½ years our group has been meeting, the technique has not failed. Later when we edit the essay, we find the many thoughtful comments in the essays before you.

But the writing has another purpose within the group, and that is to help members pull together their thoughts on a topic prior to discussion. So in the group, the writing is a means to an end—group discussion and sharing. But the writing becomes an end in itself when the essays are published in Mail Call.

Speaking of publication, we are thrilled that Mail Call is now available on our Medical Center's website. To read us on line, go to www.coatesville.med.va.gov/ and click on "News." There you will find the current issue of Mail Call, along with archived issues. As always, we look forward to your comments.

Judith A. Moser, MA, LSW

"Feeling Good"

by Fred DiDomenico

Feeling good is not the high of exhilaration or euphoria, nor the low of depression. It is in a category outside of these. It is the feeling of being "with it." Of having an understanding of what is going on in the environment and of possessing the competence to deal with it.

When there is doubt, confusion, and mystery in a situation, there is no feeling good. There is anxiety, muscle and emotional tension, and the consequent dislocation of appetite, digestion, sleep, and other physical and mental aspects of life. Feeling good, on the other hand, means relaxed muscles, untroubled emotions, confidence, and a zest for what may come.

The state of feeling good occurs when all things come together. During a walk in the woods, the coolness, the light breeze, and the naturalness of birds singing induce the feeling. It comes with getting out of bed in the early morning with a feeling of having rested and of looking forward to the day. Faced with a problem, whether of abstract thinking or of concrete mechanism, it feels good to know there is the mental ability and experience to anticipate solving it. Exercise—strenuously stretching the muscles and working up a healthy sweat—results in the feeling. Eliciting order and system out of confusion and chaos inevitably generates it.

Feeling good is a defense against the assaults of depression and grief. It is itself a dissipation of slanders and libels, leaving them not worth acknowledging. It is the absence of anger and frustration born of the assurance of equality. Melding the diversity of the population into one positively interacting whole causes the individuals therein to feel good. Feeling good generates in others the ability to also feel good. It raises the human spirit.

When we are feeling good, onerous tasks do not seem to take so long or to be so cloying. The end of them comes more quickly, and the walk down the road has a lighter step. With underlying good feeling, all life is on a higher plane.

Essays

Accepting Help from Others

To accept help, one must admit there is something is wrong, that he or she is in need. I have a problem accepting compliments from some people, because I feel they don't mean the compliments, as people are often critical of others. Those who live alone especially need a friend or two. If they heard the words, "I love you," once in a while, they would probably burst out crying.

John Adler

Accepting help from others is a positive thing. I personally get satisfaction from helping others, and accepting help can be a humbling experience. Recently the power went out at my home during a power failure, a major problem because of a freezer of meat in danger of being rendered useless. I heard from a neighbor that the local electric company was passing out dry ice to the powerless, so I went to the big giveaway and lined up with the other victims of the storm. Looking back, it was a short-lived inconvenience, but it made me realize how we all need help. When faced with a shortage of funds to attend my family reunion one summer, I had planned to skip it and go the following year. My aunt, upon hearing that, offered to buy my train ticket. It was hard for me to accept her offer because I am usually very proficient at helping myself. I accepted her offer after a lot of thought and encouragement from my siblings, who all helped. I went to the reunion and thoroughly enjoyed it, but I did have to accept their help. Part of life is giving, but it is also important to learn to accept the gifts we are given.

Harriet Lahr

I can accept help from others. It shows that they care. At times we don't have what we need, and we must accept help from others.





Politics

When people are running for office, they should not "shell out dirt" on one another. "This person did this. This person didn't do that." They should not make promises to people that they can't keep. They should try to fix up their communities, put an end to drug wars, clean up old cars left on the streets, fix up abandoned houses, create parks. Most politicians say they will clean up a lot of problems, but it often doesn't happen when they take office. What about helping senior citizens, improving Medicare and Social Security? People need work, jobs. What will politicians do for the handicapped when they take office?

Gerald Benson. Sr.

I plan to vote only for the candidates who ask for my vote. I will only choose if I get requests for more than one candidate for a position. I now believe a person's stand on the abortion issue is not a factor for change anymore. I believe the only thing good about the Democratic party nowadays is that they care more about the environment (they are going too far), and the Republicans seem to want to wage war. I am a registered Republican because I consider myself pro-life, but I do not approve of the President's handling of the situation in Iraq. So far I have not received any literature about the candidates.

John Adler

"Never discuss politics or religion at the dinner table" is an expression I read somewhere long ago. I suppose that is because politics and religion are two things that most human beings can be very passionate about. Politics in particular can bring out strong emotions, and most individuals are solidly convinced that they are correct in their opinions. There is little convincing that takes place, and debates can go on forever with each person fighting verbally to defend his or her point of view. Politics is a topic I avoid when I can. I prefer to exercise my right as a citizen to vote for the candidate I think will do the lesser damage. I am always amazed at the dismal voter turnout at the polls, especially when I hear so many people complain. Anyhow, I think politics, on the whole, is a necessary evil, and as a rule I keep my political thoughts and preferences to myself.

Harriet Lahr

Politics usually starts with one candidate taking a stand against another about their beliefs or viewpoints. Sometimes they have a debate where one candidate states what he believes and another candidate will argue the point. It goes on and on. That's government!

George Lee



Everyday is something new, A different story, just for you, About the war, economy, and life, Who's killed who, and who is right. It never seems to me that the more Interesting events of life are said. People succeeding, businesses growing, Affecting and changing cycles of life instead. I think I would like to hear more of these things, About who's helping others, the joy that they bring To those in need of a helping hand. Stories of a human brotherhood coming together like a band. Making music together for everyone to hear, To rejoice in, to be moved by, to last throughout the years.

The administration is, to me, Controlling everything under our noses, With little room to let us be Ourselves, expressing our wants and desires To know the truth, of justice, of giving real issues a try. All we hear about is war, the money needed to feed this machine, To gain more oil, our preservation of freedom—it seems— As slowly real problems are ignored. People jobless, kids going hungry, no equations fit the score. It's scary that we know very little of what we live each day. As a civil right disappears, little by little, the fray Of all the commotion about terrorism and fear--For all of this I shed a tear.

We are so blinded by the will of the few, Justice is slow to those who are blue. About their daily suffering, As time goes by,

The powers that be just let them cry. Because money and power

Are their mantras, you see,

And unless we try harder to know, It will be too late for you and me.

To do anything about the injustice in the world

For those who are the puppeteers

Will hurt any chance of changes that blossom or grow.

Be aware, question, listen, and read, Open your mind and your heart to see

What's really happening, The lies, the deceit,

So you can participate in righting the wrongs.

Give God a chance to prove to Satan

He's wrong.

We are not susceptible to corruption In such a large scale, says He,

We know true human kindness and generosity

And can move forward to create A brotherhood, this band

That can extend throughout the land

Into every home, village, town

And you'll see

A better tomorrow for you, her, him, and me.



What Prayer Means to Me

Prayer, to me, is a conversation with a Higher Power. It can be a nonverbal communication of thoughts and hopes to help me through hard times or not-so-hard times. What I pray for are intangibles...mainly strength to get through the day or the hour or the moment. Time goes on regardless of what is happening in my life on any given day. I pray for the personal fortitude I need to get through.



I read somewhere that there are three possible answers to prayer. They are "yes," "no," or "wait." Patience is a part in having prayers answered. We all need to work on being patient with ourselves or with others. I have also seen a passage that ends with the words that prayer is one of the most powerful forms of energy. I happen to believe that. How prayer works has been researched, and studies have shown that prayer can affect how people respond. I am thinking of a study where sick people were prayed for by church congregations, and their health improved compared to those who were ill but isolated. There is a reason for that, and how or why prayer works, technically, remains a mystery.

Harriet Lahr

I make reasonable and realistic requests. For example, I do not ask for salvation for a loved one. Rather, I ask for mercy on his soul. A prayer of thanksgiving is also helpful. Man just can't lie on his back and expect God to help him. Suppose you are unemployed, and instead of looking for a job, you sleep until noon. When you finally wake up, you still have a problem (you still do not have a job). Asking God to change His mind is unreasonable.

John Adler

Prayer lets me think a little. This is what prayer means to me, to have a few well- placed thoughts. And to give thanks to God for the things we've got or for the things we would like to have. Yes, prayer means to give thanks to God and really mean it.

George Lee

Prayer is always connected with religion. To pray is to practice religion. This leaves the question, "Can an agnostic pray?"

Instead of praying to a god, it is possible to analyze a situation and attach future actions to the hope arising from that situation. This is the equivalent of prayer. It does not seek the help of a higher power but derives benefit from its own analysis.

In religious prayer, there is an emotional element. Persons feel better for having prayed. In the agnostic's analysis, there is this same emotional satisfaction. It grows out of the knowledge that a situation has been completely examined and the possibilities in it noted.

In religious prayer, one is appealing to a force outside of oneself, and in asking for help, there is a question whether one will get it. The agnostic's prayer or, rather, rumination guarantees results because the supplicant is the donor.

Thus, a religious person prays, for instance, for an automobile. There is nothing but an imagined force to grant the wish. In the agnostic's prayer, the possibilities of getting an auto are within the person's power.

"A Year From Now..."

I wonder what I will be doing a year from today. It's really hard to say. But if I don't get moving, the same thing I'm doing now, I will be doing then. You must try to keep busy. Maybe I'll go to a trade school or something. I'm a little confused right now and really can't say.

George Lee

I just want what everybody has and to be treated like everybody else. That is, I want to have the same rights and opportunities as everybody is entitled to. All my life I have been treated



differently because I am different. Since childhood I have dreamed of having a family of my own, but in a little over six years, I will be eligible for Social Security. But it is hard to retire from doing nothing.

John Adler

A year from now... When I think of what I hope for in the future, the only thing that pops into my mind is good health. That doesn't mean I will get it, but it is always looming as an issue as I mature. Good physical and mental health, to me, drives everything else in life that comes my way. I am hearing more now about people who are declining in physical and mental health, and it makes me appreciate how precious good health really is. Material things have become pretty insignificant to me, so I am not out to hope for a better car or bigger house. It seems to me that relationships I choose to nurture become increasingly valuable to me. I have and will always cherish my relationship with family. I'm at a loss on how to keep going with the hope for my future.

Harriet Lahr

Gentle Thoughts

When I think of gentle thoughts, what comes to mind is my mother and how she could be sometimes. I remember her often singing to my brothers and sisters and me, sometimes songs of Christmas (Frosty the Snowman and Jingle Bells) but also other kinds of songs. She had a beautiful voice when she was at her best. It was sweet and low. She would iron my brothers' and my shirts, and I would watch. She was a great cook, taking great care to cook meals for us when she was at her best. She made the greatest-tasting biscuits and gravy. My mother was a beautiful woman, even in her later years. My oldest sister showed me a picture of her taken when she was in her twenties, and I was spellbound. At her best, my mother was very gentle with me, and I miss that gentleness sometimes. My thoughts of her are gentle.

Terry Ewell

Gentle thoughts are soft and are usually thoughts from the heart. They are useful, since most daily news is very violent. They are thoughts that are civilized. They also seem to belong to younger people or younger-thinking people. My grandmother was a youthful thinker, and she taught me to be open in my contacts with other people. She was very soft-spoken, and we would find ourselves in conversation with many people on the train into Philadelphia and also at other times. It helped me to overcome my shyness. I was a stranger in Philadelphia at that time. My grandmother has gone now but leaves behind many memories of happy times. I am grateful for my family and the times we spent together. Thanksgiving is always a good time for gentle thoughts. And prayer is another one of those good times having gentle thoughts.

Peter T. Evans

Gentle thoughts are pleasant reminders that life is precious and we are able to help others by remembering how fragile life is. Life is fragile, but so are people and their emotions. The reasons that all of us arrive where we are today are numerous and unique. Yet the basic desire for a healthy, contented life is something that most of us seek. Gentle thoughts for our fellow humans can help ease the pain of emotional turmoil, regret, and sadness. Everyone can benefit from understanding and acceptance of the person as a person, instead of rejection for the deeds he or she has done. I think that gentle thoughts or caring is a good way of helping others along their journeys. To deal harshly with our fellow humans does not help that person. Gentle thoughts can soften the soul of those in chaotic situations. People in turmoil can benefit from someone being willing to listen to their cries for help. By illuminating their strengths, the gentle thoughts of others can help encourage positive changes.

Harriet Lahr

When I think of gentle, I think of soft and a flowing of warmness. Gentle can mean kind or easy or smooth movement. It doesn't cause pain or hurt.

George Lee

The gentle thought that I have in my mind is to be humble and forgive myself for my own selfishness and self-centeredness, hoping that one day I can be forgiven for what I've caused in the past. I was a good son who lost everything in a year. I've lost everything out of anger and frustration because I've gotten good jobs and can't seem to hold onto them due to layoffs or relocations. My emotions have been so negative that it was hard for me to concentrate on my work or even think right. My depression seems to be getting worse. I'm afraid that it's hard for me to think of gentle thoughts, for my thoughts seem to be of punishment for the past.

Friends in Need, Friends in Deed

Sometimes we need a little help, so we call on a friend. This means quite a lot, because he not only helps out, he is also a close friend. His helping me brought us closer. To help someone will make you feel better, especially if it comes from the heart.

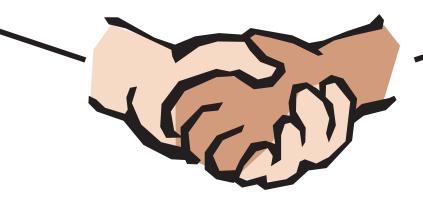
George Lee

I just read an article yesterday about how to be a friend. What struck me most was how a friend should react to a friend who could use some help. The example given was of a friend losing a loved one or being in the hospital. Don't ask what you can do for them. Just do something. Bring them something from the heart. Do something, like visiting and spending time with them. Phone them and let them know you're thinking about them. Visit them in the hospital and take them a favorite book or magazine. Many times, when you ask, "What can I do for you or what do you want me to do?" the answer is "Nothing." I think that we could all use a friend in deed. By the same token, we could be the friend in deed. So don't just ask, "What can I do for you?" Take the initiative and just do something. That is definitely a time when actions speak louder than words!

Harriet Lahr

A friend in need is a friend in deed. That is, for the most part, true. It is part of the Christian tradition to help others in times of need. At this time, I am going through a time of change that I have gone through before. This time it may be better. The people who run the group home where I live are moving on. They have mobile home and want to live that lifestyle while they can. I wish them well. They are wonderful people, and they have made provision for all of us who live in their home. We will continue to do so and will have an outstanding new manager in Pam. So our progress and the good times will continue. They will miss their "guys," and I will miss them, but we will keep in touch and enjoy the time spent with them. This is a promise to myself.

Peter T. Evans





Since age fifteen, I've had the experience of being a mental health consumer. Having spent over five years, on and off, in mental hospitals, I've found that very few people understand the torment and alienation that we do. I've experienced strait jackets, isolation cells, cold wet packs, physical abuse, and given the wrong medications. Having spent time in some of the worst mental hospital in the United States, my personal opinion is not good. Mental health consumers are alienated from society, given a label that most do not understand, and are rejected by the ignorant.

Today is different for me because people have reached out to me and accepted me, even with the many labels that have been given to me over the years. Today, because of new medications, mental health consumers can lead a productive lives and receive the respect they deserve.

Joseph Cassebaum

When you're a patient, you must be as calm as you can and kind of at rest. You must do the best you can. You must follow the rules and regulations. You can help by discussing your problems.

George Lee

Since I work here as a staff member, I work with veterans who are patients, outpatients for the most part, but not exclusively. As in all hospitals, some of the patients are sicker than others.

My own experience being a patient took place last year when I was hospitalized for four days. Being a patient meant I was on the receiving end of the caregivers—the doctors and nurses. It was an uncomfortable role for me, in that I was at the mercy of the hospital staff. It gave me a deep appreciation for staff who spoke kindly to me and tried to ease my fear about what was happening to me. I had to put my trust in their hands and pray they were competent and skillful at their jobs. I learned that surrendering control was difficult but not impossible. It gave me an appreciation of what patients here at the VA experience. I remember the nurses that took the time to talk to me and presented themselves as cheerful and upbeat. One of them allowed me to walk with my IV pole to the window down the hall so I could look outside. It was a small thing, but it meant a lot to me.

I try to do small things and acts of kindness for my patients because it helped me when I was in their shoes.

Harriet Lahr

A Man Who Walks with God Never Walks Alone

(Topic grew from morning meeting "Thought for the Day")

It seems that my walk with God is determined by my situation at any given time. Sometimes I feel as though I'm in this struggle all by myself. I believe that. It's just how I perceive it. I don't really believe that I am alone, but my walk with God has been a long and hard one because I choose to walk alone when things are going well. And I fail to realize that it is because of God that things are going well at that time. I've always seemed to walk away from God. Then when I realized that I could no longer see him, I would hurry back to try to find where I went off track. I think He really wants me to slow down, but I just keep right on speeding until I get a "ticket." And I might add that some "tickets" are more costly than others. I try to hold down my "ticket" cost as much as possible and should realize that I don't have to get a "ticket" at all if I just slow down and continue to walk with God. I guess it's easy to say that it's just my nature to go fast, but that would be a lie. I really don't like getting "tickets," but it seems as though they are drawn to me.

Shawn Claitt

Have you ever felt totally alone and alienated from life? Well, I have on many occasions. Yet I had no knowledge that my Creator was standing beside me all the time. I've come to realize and accept the fact that my Creator loves me because I'm His child, that we are all His children. No matter how much we may attempt to deny Him, He is there.

Wherever I go, God is, and all will be well. God's love surrounds me, has lightened me, and His power flows out of me. Is this statement self-serving or self-centered? Not at all, because we were made in His image and likeness, and He created us. Once we accept His love for us, we will never feel alone again.

And this is the mystery of enjoying life. This is, expressing the love that He has given to us to others means that what we receive, we also give.

So we never have to walk alone.

Joseph Cassebaum

Walking with God is as easy as the statement itself. What I mean is that, if you desire to walk with Him, He will walk at your pace because we wouldn't be able to walk at His. In the Book of Jeremiah, God asks the prophet, "If the footmen weary you, how can you expect to keep up with the horsemen?" Also, we have the assurance of God that He would never leave or forsake us. So if you have the desire to walk with God, He will certainly desire to walk with you. I know that I would rather keep pace with Him than to try to outrun Him. No matter what circumstance or condition you are in, He will be there with you. And if you're not sure, just read or listen to the vows of marriage, because we are the bride, and Christ is the bridegroom.

If your belief is strong, then I would say you walk, or can walk, with God. God is real if your belief is real. Something lets you know that God is real. It is sad to walk alone. I will describe just a little what happens when you walk alone. Sometimes you might hear voices or footsteps, and you can't think. You have to stop to get yourself together because you have been walking alone.

George Lee

What a profound statement that is. To me, it means that when I am by myself, away from the job, the family, the friends, I am still in the company of someone other than myself. From my point of view, the spirit of my Higher Power is always with me, guiding and leading me. It is a very comforting feeling to know that, even in solitary confinement, we are never truly alone. As a person who is not a church-going person (as in each Sunday morning), the spirit is with me 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I remember singing a song in the assembly room in my elementary school. We would read the words from an overhead projector. I remember specifically the song entitled, "You'll Never Walk Alone." "When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high..." and it goes on. I remember my voice cracking as I tried to reach the high notes and big crescendo at the end. I will never forget the song's powerful message and wonder sometimes how great it was that the entire class was taking part. The school was the choir. Anyway, the wise words of never walking alone ring true to me. I go in strength in solitude. I am alone at times but never lonely.

Harriet Lahr

Autumn



Autumn is passing. It's a very nice time of year. The wind rustles, and the leaves fall after they have turned colors. It's a very beautiful and picturesque time of the year. Yes, autumn is leaving, and it makes me feel a little sad.

George Lee

Autumn is the time of year when each leaf on a tree expresses its own individual beauty with a magnitude of different colors. The leaves seem to give yet another perspective on the mountains and hills.

For me, autumn represents the first football game of the year—pro, college, or high school. Being a Redskins fan living in Eagle territory is not easy, particularly if you're the only Redskins fan watching a game with the Eagles. I better not yell too loud, particularly if the Redskins are winning.

Fall has another meaning for me. It is my favorite time of the year and my favorite time of the day. I wake up each morning with spring in the air. Then about ten o'clock, summer is upon me. And about five in the afternoon fall arrives as I prepare for a good winter's sleep. Fall is tate period of time after work and before I fall asleep. I return home after a hot summer's day, shed my outward persona, and put on the real one. My clothes fall off my body like the fall leaves fall off the trees. Now I can relax, lie back, and seek the freshness of the air in fall as I become aware of the clarity around me.

I'm not ready to say farewell to autumn just yet, since it is early in the season. I certainly do not want to rush it by because I know very well what comes next. And it isn't good. I want to bask a little longer in crisp blue skies and colorful leaves. Even when the leaves fall and cover the grass, they still are a yearly miracle. I like to rustle my feet in the fallen ones as I walk through the woods. I like to catch them as they fall before they hit the ground. I always bring the first few that I catch inside and put them on my dresser to remind me that I am still pretty quick on my feet. I like to start to fix more meals in the oven in the fall. My oven does not have a purpose for me, as a rule, in the summer. I always buy candy corn for my candy dish in the fall as soon as the stores start to sell it. I put up my Snoopy flag. Snoopy and Charley Brown are kicking the colorful leaves around. I guess I'm not saying farewell to fall after all. Each season has its own beauty and traditions. I really hate to see them leave. The only one I really hope is maybe a little kinder and shorter is winter. But even winter has its glorious, beautiful moments. But that's a story for another day.

Harriet Lahr















Election is an opportunity for us to express our needs concerning the welfare of our country, state, and local governments in hopes that the representatives we choose will represent our personal views.

We live in a country that is home to 290 million citizens. As one of those citizens, I feel it is an obligation to vote during an election year. However, I find it disconcerting that we can only vote as a Republican or Democrat. No other party has been created to really express the needs of so many different ethnic groups. I find it disconcerting that we have only a hundred Senators and (I think) about 300 Congressmen, and only nine members of the Supreme Court to represent the 290 million citizens.

Election day is important because it represents the freedom of choice, the freedom of voice, and the freedom of our life in America. We have grown as a nation, both in population and diversity. I find it an impossible situation that just a few hundred men and women decide what's right and what's wrong for a country that is so beautiful, my country that I served for.

Joe Cassebaum

Well, voting time is here. Have you decided who you would like to win? It matters a lot. Vote this year for the candidate of your choice. That should not be a hard thing to do.

I must confess that I have never voted before. I did give it a lot of thought and would like to vote very much so that I, too, can be counted as an American. It doesn't mean much until then. So be counted, and get out there and vote.

George Lee

It is almost November of 2004, which means it is almost four years since November 2000. Therefore, the nation is gearing up for the presidential elections, held the first Tuesday in November. The process is a seemingly long one, since political parties start pumping up their candidates very early. Citizens must choose between whoever is in power or the challenger, who wants to be in power. The whole process can be quite exciting, as polls of "likely voters" are sought after. It seems that the polling of decisions prior to the election is predicting who will win or who will lose before a single vote is actually cast. This is very annoying to me. Maybe it will turn out as predicted, with all this buzzing and guessing, but it sure seems like a lot of useless energy to me. I want to shout, "Enough! Bring on November 2, and see what happens!" It doesn't seem right to be talking elections without

thinking about Connie Braendel. She is our current events specialist who holds court in Day Treatment Center on Tuesday mornings.

All in all, the election process is the best way to transfer power and leadership, but what we as citizens need to do is to exercise our right to vote. Make up your mind, and cast your best-educated, thought-out choice. Even though Connie is not here at the moment, I can hear her say "Amen!" to that.

Harriet Lahr





Day Treatment Center

Outing to Gettysburg National Military Park

June 30, 2004

Nine veterans and two staff made the two-hour trip to historic Gettysburg on June 30, 2004. We toured the visitor center and gift shop, bought souvenirs, and took a guided tour in the van. We purchased a two-hour cassette tape that led us around the extensive battlefields. A buffet luncheon sustained us, and everyone reported how



much they enjoyed the food. On the way back to the Medical Center, veterans reported that they had an informative and enjoyable day.

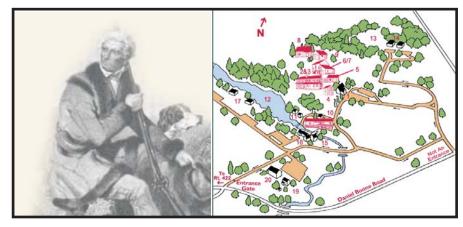
Tim Sessions, LSW

Summer Garden Lunch, July 16, 2004

Day Treatment Center was the setting for our third annual summer garden lunch, prepared and hosted by Judith Moser, LSW, on July 16, 2004. Twenty-two veterans, ten case management staff members, and two student nurses sat down together to enjoy the bountiful feast, fresh from the farms and gardens of Lancaster County. All got their recommended five fruits and vegetables at the lunch, which consisted of baked chicken, new potatoes in parsley butter, corn on the cob, fresh green beans, green salad, sliced red-ripe tomatoes, garden-fresh cucumbers, cantaloupe, and watermelon. And for the sweet tooth, Shady Maple's cookies. Sitting down to eat together, staff and veterans are able to shed their accustomed roles of case manager and clients and meet person-to-person, to discover one another as "just folks." These staff-provided lunches allow us to develop richer relationships with one another and are a welcome addition to our usual routine.

DTC Nature Group Outing to Daniel Boone Plantation

On August 4, 2004, in the midst of a heat wave, DTC Nature Group (4 vets) went on an outing to Daniel Boone Plantation and went orienteering. The installed orienteering course was approximately two miles in length, and the temperature approached 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Prior to the outing, each veteran was given a \$1.00 canteen booklet to buy two bottles



of water. Vets participated in the course with input into course selection and length. After the orienteering, the van stopped at Burger King in Morgantown for lunch. All reported having a good time and enjoyed the outing. One veteran asked that next time we have less mud. Staff who attended the outing were Tim Sessions, LSW and Linda Knight, RN.

Tim Sessions, LSW

DTC Summer Picnic

We were indeed fortunate in choosing July 29 for the annual summer picnic, as it was the only day that last week of July that torrential summer rains did not fall! Instead, the sun shone brightly and cool breezes blew on DTC members, friends, families and our invited nonveteran guests, members of Compeer, Stepping Stones, and Community Crossroads. Although this was not our first special event with our friends from the wider community, it was the first event we have hosted here at the Medical Center. We were proud to invite them to our lovely campus, and they were wowed by the bountiful food, festive tropical decorations, and great music.

Our cookout chefs (Denise and Tim) outdid themselves this year, providing all the hotdogs and hamburgers our group could eat, with many leftovers for the next day's lunch in Day Treatment Center. The burgers and dogs were supplemented by homemade baked beans, assorted salads, watermelons, and desserts, most of which were donated by staff, veterans' CRC sponsors, and guests. The food lines were long as people lined up for their plates and returned for seconds, thirds, and even fourths! But no one seemed to mind as they talked and visited with one another while waiting.

The picnic grove looked especially festive with live palm plants provided by the CWT horticulture group (thank you, Joe DiFalco!). Picnic tables were covered with white cloths and decorated with funky plastic palm trees and tropical fish provided by recreation therapist Melanie Kenninger (thanks, Melanie!). We all wore our tropical shirts and bounced to the music provided by DJs, Mike Melton and Stan Kastrava (thanks, guys!). We were also happy that friends from Medical Media joined us for lunch, and their students captured many great pictures for us to add to our DTC scrapbook and to share with our Mail Call readers (thanks, Medical Media). And special thanks also to the many veterans who pitched in and helped with decorating, setting up, and cleaning up. Many hands make light work!



Judith Moser, LSW





Trip to Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial

A warm, sunny day in late September... the rolling farmland of Central Pennsylvania... trees and hedgerows tinged with the beginning of autumn reds, oranges, and golds... fields of corn, now green and dry. These were the sights that greeted DTC members from the windows of the Bluebird bus on our way to the Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial on September 24, 2004.

Sitting on a hillside south of Fort Indiantown Gap, overlooking the National VA cemetery, the memorial stands to honor all American veterans from the Revolutionary War to today's conflicts. The 34,000 square foot fieldstone memorial was designed to resemble the remains of a bombed-out church from a World War II conflict in Normandy, France. Although a small section of the entrance to the memorial is covered (the reception area and restrooms), visitors pass through this entryway and are confronted by open sky and a sense of vastness. Avenues of Princeton elm trees stretch forward to the amphitheatre, where visitors are seated during memorial services. Bisecting the rows of elms are large fountains springing from dark granite pools. Flying majestically from the hillside above are flags for each of the Armed Services, Coast Guard, POW-MIAs, and the flag of the State of Pennsylvania. In a setting of such serenity and peaceful beauty, the sound and movement of the flags stirs feelings of majesty and pride.

This was not our first DTC visit to the memorial. Last October a large group visited and were so moved by its grandeur that they proposed a fundraiser to purchase a memorial plaque honoring past and present DTC members (see our fundraiser story in the Winter 2003/Spring 2004 issue of Mail Call). And this year's trip was planned so that we could visit our newly installed plaque and introduce other veterans to the memorial. We were met at the memorial by Hank Fiola (U.S.M.C. Ret.), who heads the committee that maintains the memorial, and by Lt. Col David Heiland (U.S.M.C. Ret.), Special Assistant, Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. They led us through the memorial and told us its story, then mingled and swapped military stories with our members. After a final visit to our plaque and walk around the memorial, we returned quietly and thoughtfully to the Bluebird.

We ate a delicious "Pennsylvania Dutch" lunch at the Farmer's Wife Restaurant and returned to the Medical Center in the capable hands of our wonderful driver, Arthur Burgess, who transported us safe and sound.

Our veteran memorials are wonderful testaments to our veterans' dedication and sacrifice. To visit a memorial is to feel our tangible appreciation.

Judith Moser, LSW



BINGO!!!

Friday afternoon, October 8, DTC members had a special bingo party. It was sponsored by Elizabeth Stipe, VALOR nursing student (and daughter of RN case manager, Jean Stipe), who has been working on an externship at the VA since last May. Many veterans attended and enjoyed the opportunity to interact with others and try their luck at winning the many prizes. All were winners, thanks to the generosity of others who made sure that everyone received a present, winners or not. The vets were very appreciative of this special activity.

Elizabeth Stipe

Get Out and Vote!

On Tuesday, September 14, DTC veterans were invited to visit Stepping Stones Clubhouse in Coatesville to take part in a seminar on "How to Vote in Pennsylvania." Veterans were given instructions on filling out registration forms and where to send them. They were also advised of the October 4 deadline for sending in their forms. One vet proudly showed his voter registration card. He is all set to vote on Tuesday, November 2.

Sample ballots and voting machines were available, and veterans were allowed to cast their votes for the "President of Entertainment" and various sports leaders. Many of the veterans taking part in the seminar were not familiar with the voting procedures or machines, so they were appreciative of the "dress rehearsal."

We thanked the members and staff of Stepping Stones for sharing this very important information with us, and everyone learned a valuable lesson on how to exercise our right and responsibility as citizens.





DTC Garden

Now that fall has arrived (though not our first frost), we watch our beautiful little garden begin to fade. Many of the more tender plants have given up, our beautiful red, white, and blue begonias and petunias. But our marigolds still call to us with their bright orange puffs, mingling well with the colorful leaves that seek their anchor. And in late summer, garden volunteer Kevin Quinn prepared the small strip across the walkway and added some hardy fall mums to the scene. These, too, continue to brighten



our entryway. See the pictures below for our garden at its most beautiful this past summer. Special thanks to all the veterans who willingly took on the tasks of keeping our garden so beautifully maintained. No staff needed to urge veterans to care for the garden. It was truly their own work of art.

Judith Moser, LSW

Luncheon at Connie Braendel's Home

On September 16, 2004, our current events volunteer (and former DTC social worker) Connie Braendel hosted a luncheon at her lovely, spacious home for the current events group. The drive to her home was scenic, and the day was bright and sunny, a perfect day in the mid 70s. It was breezy, but still shirt-sleeve weather.

A beautiful terrace surrounds her house and overlooks a sloping, landscaped lawn with beautiful trees and a large pond in the distance. Connie and her husband, an engineer, built the house after World War II. Connie's son now lives with her, helping her to care for their home.

Connie had made everything look beautiful and was so gracious to us, making us feel very welcome. We helped ourselves to chicken, salads (great potato salad), and dessert from the bountiful buffet table and carried our plates to tables set up on the terrace. We ate al fresco in the beautiful sunshine, and we didn't leave any leftovers! Many of us walked around the large property after lunch, hoping to shed a few calories!

We thank Connie for her special efforts. She helped us make wonderful memories that day!

A Day Treatment Center Halloween

Our usual schedule went out the window on October 29, 2004 when Day Treatment Center members and staff celebrated Halloween in a big way! We began at 10 a.m. with a well-attended music therapy session hosted by Joe Reilly, music therapy professor at Immaculata College, and the Dixie Chix (his music therapy students). Joe set up his amps, picked up his electric guitar, and put on an upbeat show for us. He first pulled us into the show with a rousing rendition of "Ghostbusters," with us as the chorus. Then he led us into a co-created Halloween song





Wayne Koerner's Halloween Art"

with members of DTC performing as Dracula, Frankenstein, the devil, and a witch (in costume, no less!). He even videotaped our production (for our eyes only), and we howled with laughter when we watched ourselves. A rendition of "Monster Mash" rounded out the Halloween music, but we kept singing popular tunes ("Rollin' on the River" and "From a Distance,"). And Laura, music therapist from Hilltop Heights and former student of Joe's regaled us with "Leaving on a Jet Plane." One of our members, Joe Cassebaum, accompanied Joe on the keyboard and on the spoons (oh, yes, Joe C. was in costume—a gorgeous long black wig). We ended with impromptu dancing in the aisles.

But we didn't stop the party after Joe and his students left. Barb and Harriet came forth with sandwiches, chips, cider, and a myriad of cookies and cakes, and veterans and staff relaxed a bit and visited. Then the party started up again, continuing into the afternoon when recreation therapist Krista Lewis took over with games. A few brave souls came in costume (Pinocchio, a princess, and a bag of MacDonald's fries), and some Halloween neckties were spotted in the crowd.

Who says Halloween is just for kids?



Judith Moser, LSW













Interview with Linda Knight, RN, Case Manager

Veteran was interviewed by Peter T. Evans

Linda Knight, RN case manager, is our most recent addition to the Case Management staff, coming to us from her previous position as unit RN on Ward 58B. She brings a wealth of nursing and life experience, along with a sure and confident presence.

Linda was born the second child (first daughter) to a family of five sons and two daughters. During her growing-up years, she moved numerous times while her father and mother researched the best place to operate their family business, a machine shop that contracted with the Federal government. Although they finally settled in Texas, the family lived in California, Oregon, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Tennessee while the children were in school. Linda graduated from high school while the family lived in Tennessee. She studied for a time at Middle Tennessee State University. She later returned to school as an adult after moving to the Middle Atlantic region, and graduated from Cecil County Community College. From there, she went on to Wilmington College, where she completed her BSN in nursing. Linda had always wanted to go into nursing and follow proudly in her mother's and grandmother's footsteps.

Linda began working at age 14 as a babysitter. Her first "real" job was at the Dairy Queen, where she earned \$1.10 per hour, turning over her paycheck to her father to save toward her goal of owning a car. And she did get that car after saving \$500—a tiny Austin American. She spent many of her teenage and young adult years traveling around, enjoying that car!

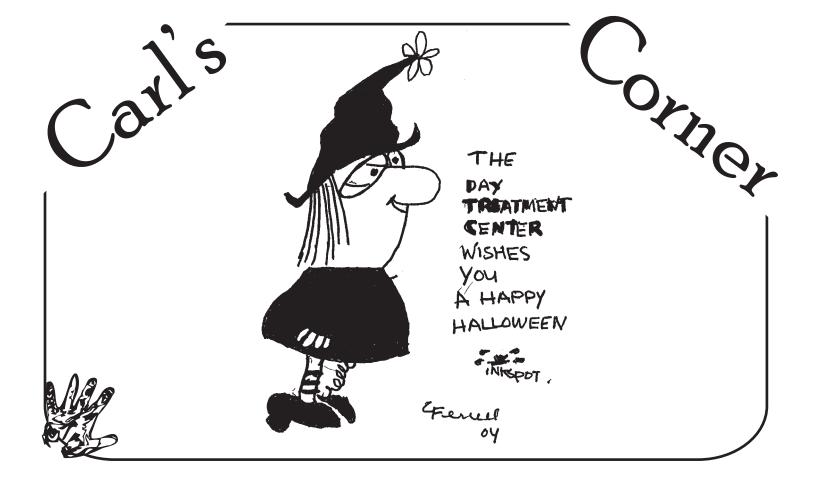
Some of her fondest childhood memories are of playing with her brothers, especially climbing to the tops of Oregon's tall trees. Her best childhood times were spent in the woods, an indication of her adventurous spirit and a sign of things to come. Today she loves bicycling and taking long walks. Walking helps her slow down to enjoy the peace she finds in nature. She is thinking of joining a hiking club.

She's got some favorite things. She's a fan of Humphrey Bogart movies, especially The African Queen, a tale of adventure that speaks to her love of nature and risk. Her favorite foods are mangos and papayas (tropical!), and she loves music, especially jazz and blues. Her favorite jazz musician is Miles Davis, and her favorite song is Louis Armstrong's version of "What a Wonderful World." And she also likes music from the 60s. Her dream vacation spots include Europe, especially Germany, Belgium, London, and Holland. She'd also like to go to Asia and Australia. Best of all, she likes the ocean, warm beaches, gritty sand, crashing waves, and the horizon in the distance.

From this picture of Linda, are we surprised to learn that she is a certified PADI scuba diver? Yes and no. It fits her adventurous spirit, but who would expect to find a scuba-diving VA nurse in our midst? Linda learned to dive when she lived in Florida, experiencing the pleasure of exploring the ocean's depths. Her deepest dive was more than 100 feet! She spoke poetically of the thrill of seeing grouper, barracuda, and schools of small fish swimming by her in the magic of underwater light. She misses diving since moving north, where diving conditions are very different. And the ocean is much farther away.

Did we mention that Linda has two sons, 22 and 19 years of age? Where did she find the time to raise two strapping big boys?

Welcome to Case Management, Linda!



Sifting through some memories

By David Babb

Sifting through some memories
Gazing at the Past
Years pass through like moments
Moments speed so fast.
Yesterday is a monument to what has
not been done,
Tomorrow just an idea that has not
yet begun.

Now as we look forward to what is yet unknown

To plan the action, make the choice from which our seeds are sown.

One thought settles all and puts the mind to rest.

Knowing strongly who you are will take on all the test.

And feeling what you know is never second best.



Gentle Thoughts

By Joseph Cassebaum

Gentle thoughts reflect a gentle heart and a warm spirit.

Gentle thoughts come after experiencing the wonders of nature or the realization that each of us is a living miracle.

Gentle thoughts allow the mind to be a peace with itself, not full of chaos and strife.

Gentle thoughts enable our physical being to feel a oneness within, as each muscle softens, relaxes, and feels at ease.

Gentle thoughts are shared with others as we speak in a tone of voice that lets us feel calm and at peace.

Gentle thoughts turn into a gentle touch between lovers when everyone around them seems to be in turmoil and strife.

Gentle thoughts come with the acceptance of the divine presence within us.

Gentle thoughts explore each other's physical body in a sea of natural euphoria and love.

Gentle thoughts are like the waves in a calm ocean or the trees blowing in a summer's wind.

They are the calmness of a still lake or a quiet pond in the middle of a forest.

Gentle thoughts come from our Creator and enter the soul, and His Spirit is then shared to all who are willing to listen to that gentle Spirit that dwells within us.



My Grandmother

By Judy Perdue

My grandmother was such a delight. She toiled diligently day and night. She taught us right from wrong And often filled her day with song. She was an old-fashioned lady in style Whose steps seemed to cover a mile. She had the whitest laundry on the line And to her neighbors, she was mighty fine. Throughout my life, she was my teacher. In her quiet ways, she was no preacher. Her belief in the "Good Book" was most profound. Her love for us was oh! so sound. She was her family's staunch support. She never seemed to be out of sorts. Her cloud of optimism seemed to permeate All around her in a glowing state. As long as I live I shall always remember From long summer days to Christmas in December. Thank you, Lord, for such a wonderful "grannie." All her life her friends were many. All who knew her loved her ways, A special person all her days.



It started so innocently

By Althea Sheldonia Culclasure

It started so innocently. A puff here and a puff there.

Hanging out, going nowhere.

Ice-cold beer was the thing to do.

I got older, and the monster grew.

A quick sniff, to numb a sexual fantasy,

All the while missing my reality.

Then, Lord, someone put fire to baking soda and coke.

To get crack.

The monster was now huge, hard to fight back.

I'd wake up out of my sleep

Holding onto a metal choy stuffed pipe I would keep.

Pushed that pipe with coat hangers from side to side.

God, this monster now had me on an endless ride.

Lost my weight, my job, my pride.

Still I could not push this monster aside.

Fate brought me down.
Divine intervention.
Then one day laying in the hospital
With a tube pumping poison from my system,
A voice inside said, "Listen,
You must fight this thing or you will surely die."
I felt the urgent need and cried,
"Crack," said, "You lied."

I recovered, and the first day I could walk
I hit the block.
Smoked some crack, ended up in lock
For a year.

While in prison I was given time to think, read, and pray.

But for real, this monster will never go away.
So I always must remember from where I came
For he is always waiting to hear his name.
I cannot fight him all by myself. I need programs,
meetings, therapist, and such.

This thing is real. This monster is much too much.

I called on God, on what I believe God to be. I take one day at a time, requesting my Higher Power enable me.

I never want to feel too much self pride on this recovery road

Because the monster is waiting, listening to every word.

He took my freedom, my health,
Most of all my family.

I have to fight, fight real hard.
I don't want to lose me...

SPECIAL THANKS TO THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS:

Contributors to this edition of Mail Call:

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Day Treatment Center Mission Statement

Peter T. Evans

The CVAMC Day Treatment Center seeks to provide a supportive, therapeutic milieu for outpatient veterans who are coping with mental illness and/or substance abuse issues. The program works to assist veterans to attain their highest level of functioning in interpersonal relationships and in their communities.

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Being A Patient

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